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ABSTRACT

To determine the work habits, reading habits, and educational influences on educational leaders, a survey was made of 75 leaders identified by Phi Delta Kappa (1981), the professional educators' association. Fifty respondents described time spent reading, materials read, size of personal libraries, length of work week, most effective work place, teaching experience, and educational influences on them. Results showed that with regard to the number of hours devoted to reading each week, the responses ranged from 1 to 40 hours, with a mean of 19.5 hours, and a median of 18.5. The number of books read during the month preceding the survey ranged from 1 as indicated by 12 respondents, to 100 books, as reported by one. Thirty of the respondents said they did their reading at home, while 14 said they did their reading in bed. Others read on the bus, at work, and at airports. The number of professional books varied from 10 to 3,000 with a mean of 607, and a median of 308. The estimated amount of time spent working each week varied from 25 hours to 100 hours, with a mean of 62.5 and a median of 60. The preferred location for work activity was the office for 21 respondents, the home for 22, and the library for 6. A considerable number of the respondents mentioned the significance of a mentor's influence. In short, the findings confirmed that success, whether in leadership or in other roles, is largely predicated on hard work. (A list of survey questions is appended.) (HOD)

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LEADERSHIP: A SURVEY OF THE READING, WORK HABITS, AND EDUCATIONAL INFLUENCES ON SEVENTY-FIVE YOUNG EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

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Abstract

For many years there has been speculation about the qualities needed for effective leadership. Universal leadership characteristics have not been positively identified. Previous research shows that leaders enjoy decision-making, are generally comfortable with authority and responsibility, tend to be intellectually able, and can motivate, secure cooperation, structure work tasks, and lead in problem-solving. Leaders also acquire and provide more information than other organization members. It is this behavior that was investigated in this study consisting of a mail survey of the reading, work habits, and educational influences on seventy-five educational leaders. An effort was made to describe time spent reading, materials read, size of personal libraries, length of work-week, most effective work-place, teaching experience, and educational influences on them. Fifty responses were received. It was concluded that effective leaders have a longer-than-average work-week, devote substantial time to reading, have well-organized and disciplined study habits, and many were influenced by a mentor.

LEADERSHIP: A SURVEY OF THE READING, WORK HABITS, AND EDUCATIONAL INFLUENCES ON SEVENTY-FIVE YOUNG EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Discussions about leadership and the qualities that distinguish effective leaders from others have long been topics of interest to people in all walks of life. Throughout the twentieth century, the study of what constitutes effective leadership has fascinated industrial managers, social scientists, the military and educators alike. For better or worse, we have come to believe that if we can somehow unlock the secrets of successful leadership we will be able to organize and manage our public institutions and businesses with greater efficiency and productivity. The thousands of books and articles on leadership and administration that have appeared since the turn of the century have clearly illustrated a desire to uncover the basis of effective leadership and organization.

To date, investigations into leadership have followed several avenues. Some have studied it as something associated with an individual's role and position in an organization; others have studied it as a product or response to certain situational factors within organizations. In addition, others have studied it as a personal trait or characteristic. Unfortunately, despite the considerable volume of research on leadership, we have as yet been unable to identify concepts or descriptions of leadership that are "universal" in that they pertain to <u>all leaders</u> in <u>all organizations</u> in <u>all kinds of situations</u>.

We have, nevertheless, learned some things of value from various kinds of leadership research. For example, leaders tend to be intellectually able, are psychologically well adjusted, generally comfortable with power, authority and responsibility, and enjoy making decisions. We have also learned that such individuals usually have a higher frequency of social interaction than those they supervise, that they have a capacity to motivate others and to secure cooperation from their staffs, that they can impose structure on work tasks, and that they "lead" in clarifying issues and in developing strategies for problem solving.

Studies of management and organization also generally concur that leaders are characterized by the fact that they acquire and provide more information than other organizational members. It is this behavior of leaders that the following discussion wishes to examine more closely, particularly as it relates to the reading habits of educational leaders in North American public schools. Apart from the intrinsic or psychic rewards that reading provides, and the professional development and opportunities that reading widely may foster, the well-read leader is an asset to any organization for a number of reasons.

There is the matter of communication. It has become axiomatic that good communication is the lifeline of every organization and that if one wishes to be an effective leader, one must also be an effective communicator. With little risk of overstatement, no subject of administrative study and practice has received quite the same amount of attention as communication, whether it relates to the formal transmission of ideas and directives along

hierarchical lines of command, or whether it involves informal interchanges among members of work groups. The size and complexity of modern organizations make effective communication systems and communicators an organizational necessity rather than a luxury.

Communication and, ultimately, leadership depend on information and the capacity to transmit what we know. In effect, we can say that both communication and leadership involve learning something and teaching it to others. Obviously, this brings us to the question of how we learn and how we instruct or inform others. Recent technological advances notwithstanding, most of us still obtain the majority of our information principally through reading; furthermore, we share what we know through writing. We also continue to believe, as we have since classical times, that reading not only provides us with information and new perspectives but that it also affords us opportunities to improve our critical and analytical skills. We further believe that careful and frequent reading of materials in our own areas of interest and expertise, and in other areas, sharpens our use of language and the ability to communicate effectively with others in both written and oral fashion.

Such benefits have particular meaning and value to modern organizations. Within the bureaucratic labyrinths that characterize many of the nation's great private corporations and public institutions, clarity and precision of communication are highly prized for obvious reasons. Writers on administration and organization have repeatedly emphasized that it is essential for enterprises of all kinds to be able to frame their objectives clearly and to

be able to communicate these objectives to managers and workers at all levels. By doing so, organizations delineate areas of authority and responsibility, specify methods of operational procedure, and generally attempt to reduce the uncertainty that plagues all organizations.

The possession of both broad and specialized information by organizational members and their capacity to communicate this information is generally associated with professional competence. Not only does knowledge or technical expertise give individuals confidence in dealing with the problems they face, but it is generally believed that a correlation exists between the level of this knowledge or expertise and the level of organizational power and influence that organizational members enjoy. In short, knowledge and, ultimately, certain reading habits are intimately associated with leadership.

A second and no less important connection between reading and leadership has to do with the problem of organizational insularity. Students of administration and organization have long recognized the fundamental "incompleteness" of most organizations and their tendency to become insulated from the environmental contexts in which they operate. Recent research and study of organizational behavior strongly favors a view of organizations as "open systems" or as entities greatly dependent on the energies and resources of the world around them. If organizations are to adapt to the changing conditions in their external environments, they must continually import energy and support in the form of ideas and resources from their social surroundings.

To do this, organizations typically rely on their staff members, principally their leaders, to keep abreast of current events and to serve as organizational "filters" charged with the responsibility of sifting through new and pertinent information, not simply in the technical areas under their jurisdiction but also in the broader realms of emerging knowledge pertaining to social and scientific development. Organizations fortunate enough to have individuals who read widely appear to enjoy some advantage over organizations led and staffed by those less cognizant of cultural, political, economic or legal matrices which may affect the policies, decisions or products a particular organization makes. Put simply, well-read individuals provide their organizations with an ongoing form of social surveillance and, in some instances, serve as early warning instruments in that they alert the organization to developing trends. In doing so, they help an organization to maintain its sense of equilibrium and revise its products or services in line with changing public tastes.

Closely related to the matter of overcoming organizational insularity is a third area in which information and reading appear to be important: Organizational decision-making and change. A sound information base is a vital element of the decision-making process. Although no one individual or group of individuals can necessarily examine all the information or factors that may relate to a particular issue, it is generally believed that so-called "good" decisions are associated with the availability of relevant information, clear judgement in examining alternatives, and sufficient intellectual energy to bring about the closure of debate. Organizational

members, however, are often constrained in their approaches to decision-making and in the ways in which they envision their alternative courses of action. Stated somewhat differently, organizations commonly form habits which in themselves may preclude certain kinds of choices or opportunities for change. By reading widely, organizational staff and their leaders can reduce the tendency to keep seeing the world in the same ways. They can, in effect, break certain habits or patterns of behavior that may, over time, be detrimental to organizational growth and development.

It is important to remember that the capacity of organizations to make "good" decisions or to adapt to altered circumstances within and outside the organization is wholly dependent on the perceptions of organizational members and, most notably, the perceptions held by organizational leaders. It is probable that perceptions about specific problems or about the nature of things in general are greatly influenced by exposure to the new and different ways of looking at the world that may be gleaned from reading. Presumably, those whose reading habits regularly expose them to the diversity and complexity of human experience and learning continue to enjoy a certain intellectual flexibility. In addition, they may also keep their critical or analytical skills in somewhat better repair than those who read and think more narrowly, or than those whose intellectual energies and interests remain largely confined to addressing nothing broader than the immediate work problems they face.

The growing interrelatedness of modern life has made new and onerous demands on organizations in terms of public accountability. Perhaps more than ever before, organizational policies, products and services are scrutinized by a host of special interest constituencies desirous of seeing their

own aims realized in the goals of the organizations that serve them. What this means is that organizational leaders are increasingly compelled to justify, if not defend, the organization's positions or activities in a variety of areas. To do this effectively, organizations rely on staff members who are familiar with the shifting social, economic and political currents of the external environment, and who can explain and communicate to the outside world the rationales underlying specific organizational behaviors. Again, to be successful in this respect, organizational members require certain communication skills and a general level of knowledge. Each of these are usually regarded as products of reading widely.

Having shown in the foregoing examples how well-read organizational members can serve the enterprises in which they work, the writers surveyed the reading and work habits of various educational leaders. Specifically, we have surveyed (see Figure 1 for an example of the survey) the reading work habits and educational influences on the seventy-five educational leaders identified by Phi Delta Kappa (1981). This was done in an effort to describe the amounts of time these individuals spend reading, the kinds of materials they read, the resources they use, and the influences that have shaped their reading habits. We also surveyed a number of other areas related to their occupational behavior and professional development, including the numbers of hours they work each week, their perceptions about when and where they work most effectively, and their teaching experience.

Results of the Survey

Fifty of the 75 recipients responded to the survey. Of these, 20 (40%) indicated that they have been able to read prior to first attending school, while 21 (42%) stated that they had not. The nine remaining (18%) did not respond to the question. Thirty-six of the respondents remembered their parents reading to them, and 32 stated that there was a variety of reading materials available to them in the home. Frequent visits to the local library with parents were indicated by 21 respondents; 39 reported that they now use library materials frequently.

With regard to the number of hours devoted to reading each week, the responses ranged from one to 40 hours, with a mean of 19.5 hours, and a median of 18.5. Two of the respondents reported reading three newspapers per day, 26 read two, and 19 regularly read one paper per day. The number of magazines read per month varied from a low of three, to a high of 25, with a mean of 10.3, and a median of 9.7.

The number of books read during the month preceding the survey ranged from one, as indicated by 12 respondents, to 100 books, as reported by one. The mean number of books read during that month was 5.0, and the median 2.6. The number of books read during the previous year, ranged from three to 250, with a mean of 30.8, and a median of 15.

In answering the question of where these educators did most of their reading, the responses were that thirty said they did their reading at home, and 14 of these said they did their reading in bed. Others (five) read on the bus, five at work, and two at airports.

With regard to the size of personal libraries, the number of professional books varied from ten to 3,000 with a mean of 607, and a median of 308. More general library holdings ranged from ten to 9,900 with a mean of 858, and a median of 301.

Several questions in the survey focused on factors associated with work. Of the 50 respondents, 49 reported having teaching experience which ranged from five to 22 years, with a mean and median of 13.5 years. The estimated amount of time spent working each week varied from 25 hours to 100 hours, with a mean of 62.5, and a median of 60.0. This finding parallels a similar finding in a study by Clark and Cochoran (1983) of university faculty productivity.[2] Their highly active group also reported that they spent 60 or more hours per week in work-related activities. Thirty-three of the respondents indicated a preference for working in the morning, two during the afternoon, four during the evening, and six at night, after 11:00 p.m. The preferred location for work activity was the office for 21 respondents, the home for 22, and the library for six.

Three questions touched on more personal aspects. In response to, "Where did you learn most in your graduate program (courses, student interaction, advisor, thesis or dissertation, etc.?") 17 indicated coursework, ten stated student interaction, seven felt their advisors had been most helpful, five suggested the process of producing a thesis, three had obtained greatest benefit from an internship experience, and three felt that their own independent study had provided the best learning.

For the question, "Has any particular individual had an impact on you professionally?" the following responses were given: Seventeen stated that a professor or teacher had a major impact on them; 12 said their chairman or their major advisor was significant; the remaining responses indicated that for five, it was some family member, and three pointed to their boss as having a great influence. One respondent made the following statement about the importance of having a mentor:

> I firmly believe in the value of a mentor and a model. There is always someone who demonstrates something (knowledge, personality, style, etc.) from which I can learn or benefit. Heaven forbid I should ever stop learning -- how dull life would be. These people have been good intellectuals, hard workers, humanists -- sensitive people with a good sense of humor, a love of life and a good sense of self. That is how I would like to be.

It is not surprising that a considerable number of Phi Delta Kappa's young leaders mentioned the significance of a mentor's influence. Many business and industrial leaders have also noted how their own career development was advanced by more senior and experienced executives who took somewhat of a personal interest in their success. There are many advantages to this form of sponsorship, such individuals advise. Mentors help younger people in identifying challenges to be met and in analyzing and solving problems; they provide valuable kinds of knowledge gleaned from experience; they furnish

informal support and counsel during difficult times; and, finally, by their own example, they illustrate the importance of good human relations and a strong sense of commitment to the tasks at hand.

Responses to the question, "How do you maintain a high level of enthusiasm (jogging, reading, painting, etc.?") indicated that 14 found regular exercise to be beneficial, eight enjoyed reading, six were sustained by talking with colleagues, five were involved in music, five considered themselves to be self-motivated, and two were encouraged most by their families.

To summarize briefly, our survey of Phi Delta Kappa's young educational leaders has revealed several interesting results. First of all, it appears that the individuals who are perceived by their peers to be effective leaders work hard and that the length of their work-week is considerably longer than that of most people. In fact, these educational leaders and the faculty members singled out by Clark and Cochoran as highly productive, work approximately sixty hours a week, or about one-and-one-half times the standard forty-hour work-week. Such a lengthy work-week, and the fact that many of these individuals completed much of their work at home, suggests the high level of commitment these people exhibit toward their work. In short, our findings in this respect merely confirm what we have all known for a long time -- namely, that success, whether in leadership or in other roles, is largely predicated on hard work.

Our survey also indicated the substantial amount of time these educational leaders devoted to reading in both their own area of specialty and in broader fields of knowledge. They appear to be well organized and disciplined in their study habits and appear capable of imposing the structure necessary to read and to complete work assignments outside office hours.

Finally, it is noteworthy that almost three-quarters of our respondents gave a measure of credit to other individuals who have helped them in their careers or who have served in some way as role models. Indeed, it appears from our survey that many of these educational professionals have been strongly influenced by other individuals at work who have taken an interest in their careers and personal development.

References

Clark, S., & Cochoran, M. (1983, April). Development of guidelines for policy-relevant studies of faculty vitality through an institutional case study. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada.

Phi Delta Kappa. (1981). Young leaders. Kappan, 62(5), 335-350.

Figure 1 Survey Questions Used for the Paper

If you wish your name can be included: _____

If there are some questions you do not wish to answer, skip over them.

1. Did you read before you began school?
2. Do you remember your parents reading regularly?
3. Was there a variety of reading materials available in your home as you were growing up?
4. Did your parents take you to the library frequently?
5. How many hours per week do you read?
6. How many newspapers do you read every day?
7. How many magazines have you read in the past month?
8. How many books have you read in the last month?
9. How many books have you read in the past year?
10. Where do you do most of your reading? On the bus? In your living-room, in bed, at work?
11. Roughly estimate how many books you have in your personal library:

    General: Professional:

12. On the average, how many hours do you estimate that you work each week?
13. What time of day do you prefer working?
14. Where do you consider is the best place for you to do your work?
15. How long have you been teaching?
16. Has any particular individual had an impact on you professionally?

    Who?

17. How do you maintain a high level of enthusiasm? (jogging, reading, painting, etc.)
18. Where did you learn most in your graduate programme (courses, student interaction, advisor, thesis or dissertation, etc.)?